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THE

UNITARIAN

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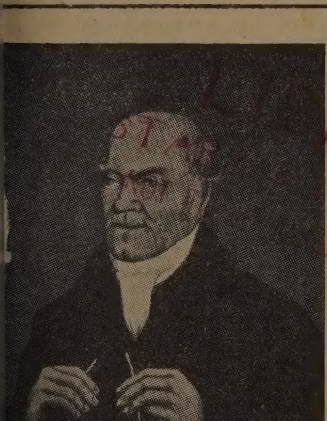


JOHN ASHWORTH'S "LETTERS"

Methodist Unitarian Theology, By E. Basil Short, B.Sc.

As we saw last month, the followers of Joseph Cooke published their hymn-book in 1813. This book reflects the theological position of the movement in 1811, the year of Cooke's death: for the major part of the book was compiled by the leader. By 1815 a further development had taken place. The ex-Methodists discovered that they were Unitarians.

The story of the pilgrimage is told in a book, published in 1817,

entitled, "An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Unitarian Doctrine in the Societies at Rochdale, Newchurch in Rossendale, and other places, formerly in connexion with the late Rev. Joseph Cooke: in Ten Letters to a Friend. By John Ashworth." The book is an expansion of a memorial prepared at the request of the Rev. Richard Astley and Dr. J. Thompson, both of Halifax, in support of an application for a grant from Lady Hewley's Fund to the Newchurch congregation, who were saddled with a debt of £350 upon their chapel. The application was successful, a grant of £12 a year being made. This was a great encouragement to the congregation, but Dr. Thompson was anxious to secure further help, and asked permission to publish the memorial in the *Monthly Repository* for May, 1815. Apparently there was a generous response from the Unitarian public, for the debt was almost liquidated within two years.

John Ashworth also promised to let his friend, Dr. Thompson, have "a more detailed account of the rise and progress of their enquiry after truth." The "Letters" were the result.

John Ashworth made no claim to scholarship. He and his associates were humble working men. They were, however, intensely earnest about matters of religion. Having been led to doubt the truth of certain Methodist doctrines, they turned to their Bible in order to determine what the true faith of a Christian should be. Their starting point was the recognition that much Methodist preaching was contrary

to the Biblical doctrine that man has the duty and the ability to repent. This was a doctrine of personal responsibility, and it became the foundation stone of their thought. It led them to reject the doctrine of Original Sin and the theory of vicarious Atonement. It also explains their sympathy with the Chartist proposals for a wider franchise. It gave them the courage to go on with their enquiries after truth, in spite of the bitter opposition of former friends.

The first eight letters deal with the foundation of the churches and with the theological developments up to the time of Cooke's death. There remained one doctrine which still perplexed them, and about which Cooke had given no guidance —the doctrine of the Trinity. The Athanasian Creed speaks in the first part of three persons who are each God: the second part says that there is but one God. They had been told that the doctrine was a great mystery. "We beg leave to say," wrote Ashworth, "that this doctrine appears to us to be no mystery at all. A mystery is something which a man does not understand; but we understand the above assertions, and, taking the whole of them together, to us they appear to be nothing less than gross contradictions: and for this reason, instead of calling this doctrine a mystery, it should be called an absurdity."

Ashworth goes on to point out that many passages of scripture, particularly in the fourth gospel, make a clear distinction between God and Jesus. These make it plain that if Jesus is God, there must be two Gods: but, as this must be contrary to scripture, Jesus cannot be God. The writer was well aware of the arguments which were advanced against his position, and he dealt faithfully with them, showing that they were illogical, unscriptural and derogatory. Nevertheless it was not easy to be heretical. "We have been repeatedly accused of throwing away the Bible and of having got a new Bible. But the real fact is, it was from the Bible, but particularly from the common version of the New Testament that we learnt what we now believe. Such was our ignorance of men and books that taught what we now believe, that at the time we were relinquishing the doctrines of reputed Orthodoxy, we supposed ourselves to be the only people in the world who believed in this way; and ...to have our hand against every man and every man's hand against us. The painful sensations which we felt on this account are indescribable, and at times made us wish that we could see as our Christian neighbours did. But the plain, simple scriptural truths which we had embraced were powerful, and we durst not, even to avoid persecution, ignominy and pain, deny what appeared to us to be God's truth, and violate our consciences; and, whatever men might think or say of us, we could appeal to God, the searcher of hearts, that in these things we had been acting to the best of our judgment."

It was a happy day for the heretics when they discovered that they were not "the only people in the world who believed in this way". The Methodist Unitarians became part of a wider movement, though retaining to this day the spirit and sturdy independence which carried them through the difficulties of the early days.

If that should be thought to be a criticism of them, let it also be said that, in his first letter, John Ashworth commended to his fellow Unitarians the circuit system. "And I cannot but think, sir, that if something like this was adopted and pursued by Unitarians, Unitarianism would soon spread over the country." Who knows?

STARTING AGAIN

By Joyce Hazlehurst

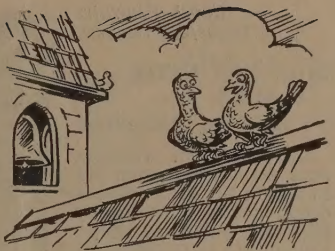
It is sometimes exhilarating to nake a new start. How exciting it vas, going up to one's new class t school—new books, new subjects, iew relationships! Everything vould be different and very much etter. So one felt—until the first ad mark, the first "row," the first umble. But when one tumbles, one as to pick oneself up: once again, ne has to make a new start, and his time it is not exhilarating, but ifficult and painful.

I have just been re-reading the ermon I preached on January 1st, 956. I had quite forgotten it. I aid, "In 1956 we are going to take ome tumbles, as individuals, as a hurch, and as a nation." How erious our national tumbles would e, however, I had no idea! Yet ere we are in the midst of them, nd we have to pick ourselves up nd start again.

Douglas Bader, the legless pilot, et himself to walk with artificial egs without crutches, an achieve- nent everyone said was impossible. Ie learnt how to do it, nevertheless, hrough perpetually tumbling, pick- ng himself up and starting again, a rim battle with humiliation and ain. He won through because he ever lost the ideal of himself, walk- ng, and ever afterwards has en- ouraged other legless people to alk. And what inspired him in he first place? The sight of an nfant trying to walk and taking umbles.

Christmas is only just over. As e start 1957, picking ourselves up ainfully, maybe, from various umbles, as individuals, as Churches nd as a nation, we look back to the nfant Jesus, and pray for strength o follow his example.

Stumbling and falling in dis-
astrous night,
Yet hoping ever for the perfect
day."



Do you mind if I rest here a bit? I'm from Hungary.

Donations for Hungarian relief may be sent to British Council of Churches Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Department, 10, Eaton Gate, London, S.W.1.

STOCKPORT. The new minister received an enthusiastic welcome in November and the church has been very active in preparation for Christmas.

TRANSACTIONS OF THE UNITARIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Vol. XI Part 1 1956
Editor: Dr. H. McLachlan

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Daniel Jones and his Fund, J. Islan Jones.

Polish Brethren and the problem of Communism in the XVIth Century, Stanislaw Kot.

Earl Morse Wilbur: Scholar and Traveller, H. McLachlan.

Our Contemporaries: Officers: Report: Accounts.

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Capel Pen-rhiw before removal

JOURNEY INTO WALES

By Fred Hankinson

Our Unitarian Temperance Association asked me to attend the 83rd autumn conference of the United Kingdom Band of Hope Union, held at Cardiff, and I found myself listed as preacher on the Sunday at two Unitarian churches: Aberdare and Pontypridd.

On the previous Friday, I was the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Wilson, formerly of Kilburn, and on Saturday we went by car to the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagan's Castle, especially to see the ancient Capel Pen-rhiw which formerly stood at Drefach Felindre, and was presented by the South Wales Unitarian Association. It is a typical example of early Welsh non-Conformist building, severe and barn-like, with gallery and part of the once three-decker pulpit. The pews are irregular and it is thought that each family was responsible for making its own pew. The reconstructed Chapel of 1777 has left a building of simple beauty and worshipful atmosphere.

The re-dedication on June 14th last was described in "The Times": "The service...was very devout and in keeping with its Faith. The Curator said it was the intention to hold services on Sunday afternoons, and these could be arranged by any Christian denomination, and surely the South Wales Unitarian Association will recall the faith of the Puritan ancestors. The Rev. William Thomas, 1834-1879, whose bardic name was Gwylym Marles, the great uncle of Dylan Thomas, the minister, and one of his hymns was sung at the re-opening."

It is hoped to have the Chapel solemnised for marriages at a later date.

That evening I attended the Conference at the Cory Hall with a concert by Band of Hope members and short speeches. Hundreds of happy young children came from many areas with their leaders.

On Sunday we drove some 20 miles via the Rhondda Valley with its streams, mining villages and innumerable nonconformist Chapels and hillsides with miners' houses. The Aberdare Old Meeting is a lovely building, and the morning service being in English, I conducted the worship. The Rev. O. J. Davis came along with his congregation from Highland Place Unitarian Church to the Old Meeting How devoted these Welsh folks are to our faith in the midst of such narrow evangelical Calvinism! And how they welcomed a brother from over the border!

Mr. Wilson conducted evening service at Aberdare, and I took the Harvest Festival at Pontypridd. The tasteful harvest decorations included a large piece of coal. It was a joy to preach in a full Chapel with a congregation including a

large number of young people. At the close the Rev. Alan Taylor introduced me to two women and one man student who were about to go to London University, wanting to know which was their nearest chapel, and to hear about the University Unitarian Society. My hostess that night was Mrs. James, once of Little Portland Street and Kentish Town Churches, both now demolished.

The Conference continued on the Monday, and in the evening I met Cardiff's Lay Minister, Mr. Roy John and his wife and spoke to their Youth Club in the Church where I had preached 53 years ago. It is a very well kept central Church and continues to grow. There is life and activity among the Unitarians of South Wales.

RECOMMENDED

Personal Testimonies—Nos. 5—8

The four booklets (1d. each) from the Lindsey Press keep up the standard of the first four. The musician declares his belief that tolerance must not be confused with indifference, and his continued belief in "progress onward and upward for ever"—a statement which has been much frowned upon, but so long as progress is not taken to be automatic, it is probably a true article of *faith* for as long as time lasts. The Member of Parliament sees Unitarian Churches as united in the service of Christian morality democracy and peace. The Public Servant tells how his faith stood up to army service, and how it tied up with various personal relationships in changing types of job. The farmer supplies a simple personal creed, and tells how he cannot imagine God breaking the rules of biology that he has laid down. Helpful thought has gone into all these statements.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

S.O.S. for Sammy

Sammy the Soldier was marching back again when he suddenly saw a running figure coming towards him. As he came nearer, Sammy saw the man beckon urgently and heard his cry for Sammy to hurry. Sammy also saw that the man was the Mayor's valet. Nobody else was in sight, certainly not his sergeant, so Sammy broke into a run.

"What is the matter?" cried Sammy.

The valet was too exhausted to be able to speak for a minute or two; but when he could, he said that Sammy had to report immediately to the Mayor's Parlour—apparently it was a matter of life and death. Sammy's blood ran cold and it was a very agitated couple who eventually panted up to the Town Hall, pushed through the swing doors and pulled up outside *the* door, which carried in bold letters the words: *The Mayor*; and lower down, very sternly: *Knock and Wait.*

"Oh, never mind that," the valet said crossly, "we haven't time; and, anyway, the Mayor told me to bring you in right away."

Sammy said nothing. for he was a helpful lad and could see that the valet was bothered. He just followed and found himself pushed forward to the Mayor's Desk, a most imposing piece of furniture. He stood smartly to attention with the valet at his side and looked down on a head which was bent very industriously over something on the desk. The valet cleared his throat and the head was raised. It revealed the red face of His Worship the Mayor; and the spectacles on a cord immediately fell off his nose and tinkled against the mayoral chain. The Mayor leapt out of his chair.

"Sammy!" he cried, "Sammy! You've come! Just the man I've been looking for!"

(to be continued)

NEWS AND VIEWS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Twenty-five or more congregations have now agreed to adopt the "Simplex Envelope Offertory scheme" by which regular weekly subscriptions will be paid not only by the members to their church funds, but also to the funds of the General Assembly and the Local Association. One church has sent in a quarter's contributions already, though the G.A. had not asked churches to begin the scheme until the New Year.

THE CHURCHES

BOURNEMOUTH. The Church Anniversary collections amounted to £44, and a successful Gift Day has been held.

BRISTOL. LEWIN'S MEAD Theatre Club and F.o.Y. combined to produce a show entitled "Christmas Crackers" on two nights in December in aid of the Restoration Fund. The November Fair raised £140.

DUKINFIELD has held a Christmas Bring-and-Buy sale as a preliminary effort towards their 1957 Centenary Bazaar.

FLOWERY FIELD reports their first Men's Week-End and also a Y.P.L. week-end. The Y.P.L. membership has greatly increased since its founding in 1956. The morning Children's Church has adopted the "house system" of organisation, the first monthly competition between the houses being won by Barr House.

MANCHESTER. ALTRINCHAM Christmas Fair in November overshot its target (£250) for the first time, by several pounds. A study circle on religious questions which meets twice a month is being well supported. BROOKFIELD CHURCH, GORTON, has again arranged a series of four Wednesday evening services in Advent, with visiting preachers, as a counterweight to the increasing tendency to commercialise the Christmas season. CROSS STREET CHAPEL held a very successful bazaar in November, and again arranged Wednesday mid-day services in Advent with visiting preachers. PENDLETON Sale of Work was again well supported and the annual pantomime, "Goody Two Shoes," written by one of the members was well rehearsed for production before Christmas. WYTHENSHAWE has started a small Y.P.L. branch, after a special Youth Service conducted by the Rev. A. W. Vallance, with the help of Mr. Keith M. Noble, of Altrincham. The Sunday School and Y.P.L. have jointly produced a colour-film of their Nativity Mime, thanks to the enthusiasm of Mr. J. Westaway and other helpers.

MANSFIELD raised £200 by a Sale of Work in October, and arranged a united evening Carol Service on December 23rd with the congregation from Field Row Chapel, Belper, which the Mansfield members had visited in the summer. It is hoped that these two visits will become regular events. The congregation has links with the Unitarian Church in Budapest and is disturbed that no news had come through from the minister by the end of November.

NEWCHURCH. The 150th Anniversary celebrations came to a climax in October. The congregation was one of the earliest Methodist Unitarian causes and was founded in 1806. The anniversary events included a concert by the Juniors and a demonstration service "Building the Church." The Young People held a service "The Founders," and sang some of Joseph Cooke's hymns, with readings from John Ashworth's letters. A re-union was held on the third Saturday, with a service conducted by Rev. C. G. Bolam (minister 1938-44), and a plaque with the names of all ministers of the congregation since the foundation was unveiled by Mr. Law Ashworth. Two hundred attended tea and Mrs. Proctor, President of the Congregation read greetings from distant

friends. The Rev. F. Sokell (minister 1945-51) preached on the Sunday afternoon at a very moving marriage commemoration service. In the evening members of church and school presented a pageant, "The Candle of the Lord," representing Joseph Cooke and John Ashworth returning to discover the links which bind them to their successors. Four historical episodes showed Amos confronting Amaziah, Joan Waste on trial for heresy, Theodore Parker and Lloyd Garrison fighting slavery, and John Johns coming to the decision which cost him his life. The service ended with a completely unexpected demonstration of enthusiasm and loyalty when "the founders" appealed for signs that "the Light still shines." On the final week-end, the Rev. Dr. H. J. McLachlan, of Belfast, preached from the pulpit given by his father, Rev. Dr. Herbert McLachlan, in memory of his grandfather. Since the present organ was installed in 1868 all the organists have been members of one family, Miss Olive Holt being now the fourth of the line.

SWINTON Sale of Work raised £263 and an enjoyable occasion concluded with films and an Old Fashioned Evening conducted by the U.Y.P.L. and a tense performance of "Murder in the Red Barn." Essex Hall boxes were opened at a tea on December 8th.

URMSTON Sale raised £85, opened by Mrs. P. B. Godfrey. The room has a new look thanks to new stage curtains provided by the hard work of several members.

RECOMMENDED

Christian Faith for To-day, by John Ferguson (paper 7s., boards 10s. 6d., Koestline, U.S.A., distributed in G.B. by Housman's Bookshop) is a useful explanation of a modern liberal Christian's religion. It consists of talks given at a North of England Y.M.C.A. and since repeated elsewhere. The opening is perhaps the best part. Mr. Ferguson rejects the virgin-birth doctrine, but accepts, perhaps too easily, the orthodox teaching on the physical resurrection of Jesus. For young people the arguments for a thoughtful religion are well assembled and illustrated.

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CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE WORKHOUSE

It really was, and on a Sunday too, and since it was our habit to visit the casual ward on Sundays, off we trooped with some humour and expectancy. It was in the early 'thirties, and the place was full. Conversation flowed easily along the channels of work prospects in the New Year, until the tramp-major came in and asked us to move on.

Unheedingly I shook hands with the man with whom I was talking and to my surprise I found a second hand outstretched, and another and another. In a space there were a dozen waiting. "These fellows," I thought sadly, "don't get much opportunity of shaking hands."

And then something seemed to click, and I heard a whisper, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren," and it flowed over me that I had been thanked by the Master. He had used me to give these men their Christmas Communion, and I walked out on air, albeit with tears in my eyes.

TODMORDEN. The sixth annual service of the Yorkshire Esperanto Association was held in the church in December and was conducted by the minister, the Rev. A. L. Finbow. A Christmas Market, and a Sunday School Bring-and-Buy sale were also held in December.

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